

he would have lent a deaf ear to the persuasive Paolo Giovio.

Vasari survived the second edition of his *Lives* by six years, dying in 1574 at the height of his fame. Soon after his death his reputation as a painter sharply declined, but the *Lives* continued to be appreciated. Several annotated scholarly editions appeared and were translated into French, German, and English. There are two complete translations of Vasari into English, one published in 1850, the other in 1912-1915. The version presented here first appeared in 1885; Miss Elizabeth L. Seeley, an Englishwoman, who, selecting what seemed to her the most important chapters, abridged and translated them, succeeding in retaining the novelistic charm of the original, its quaint archaism, as well as its sometimes didactic and even moralistic tone.

Very wisely Miss Seeley refrained from expunging material that was, beyond any doubt, in the realm of fable—for instance, the story that Castagno murdered Domenico Veneziano, it being a proven fact that Domenico outlived Castagno by several years. Vasari did not invent this calumny; he simply took it over from another writer. (The Florentines, on account of Castagno's brutal apostles and saints, believed the artist to have been a wicked man, capable of anything, including homicide.) All the amusing little stories are retained, too, among them the one about Uccello who had to paint the four elements, and with each, the appropriate animal. For air, there should have been a chameleon, but since Uccello had never seen one, instead he painted a camel.

Since both the abridged and unabridged editions of Vasari in English translation have been out of print for some years, the present edition fills a gap. Here we can go with Vasari to the churches of Florence and Assisi, Venice and Padua, and look at panels and frescoes, most of which, fortunately, have survived to this day, and watch, not only the great painters like Da Vinci and Michelangelo, but also lesser men, struggle with their medium to accomplish the best for God's lasting glory—and their own.

Yes, Vasari was a great artist in his clever distribution of light and shade, and dramatic application of contrasting colors. It is a pleasure to meet, not a genius perhaps, but a first-rate craftsman in intimate touch with all sides of artistic life, a man endowed with sharp eyes, humor and a good temper that rarely failed him. Let us delay no longer, but open ourselves to this man whom even so critical a contemporary of ours as Bernard Berenson could not help loving as "a great appreciator . . . and a passionate anecdote-monger."

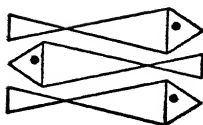
ALFRED WERNER

# LIVES OF THE ARTISTS

GIORGIO VASARI

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED  
BY E. L. SEELEY

INTRODUCTION BY  
*Alfred Werner*



THE NOONDAY PRESS  
*a subsidiary of*  
FARRAR, STRAUS & CUDAHY

Introduction Copyright © 1957 by The Noonday Press, Inc.

*Fourth Printing 1961*

*Printed in the U.S.A.*

DESIGNED BY THE NOONDAY PRESS  
NOBLE OFFSET PRINTERS, INC.  
NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. CIMABUE AND GIOTTO . . . . .	I
II. THE GADDI AND BUFFALMACCO . . . . .	13
III. ANDREA DI CIONE ORCAGNA, SPINELLO, DELLO, AND PAOLO UCCELLO . . . . .	31
IV. LUCA DELLA ROBBIA AND LORENZO GHIRBERTI .	45
V. FILIPPO DI SER BRUNELLESKO . . . . .	55
VI. DONATELLO . . . . .	72
VII. FRA ANGELICO . . . . .	81
VIII. ANTONELLO DA MESSINA, ANDREA DAL CAS- TAGNO, AND DOMENICO VENEZIANO . . . . .	86
IX. FILIPPO LIPPI AND BOTTICELLI . . . . .	96
X. PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA AND LUCA SIGNORELLI	106
XI. GHIRLANDAJO, COSIMO ROSSELLI, AND PIERO DI COSIMO . . . . .	112
XII. FRA BARTOLOMMEO AND MARIOTTO ALBERTI- NELLI . . . . .	126
XIII. THE BELLINI AND ANDREA MANTEGNA . . . . .	134
XIV. LIONARDO DA VINCI . . . . .	140

JUN 11 '62

THE HUNT LIBRARY  
CARNEGIE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
XV. GIORGIONE AND FRA SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO	162
XVI. PERUGINO AND RAFFAELLO . . . . .	171
XVII. ANDREA DEL SARTO . . . . .	186
XVIII. MATURINO AND POLIDORO AND MONSIGNORI .	199
XIX. IL ROSSO . . . . .	208
XX. PARMIGIANO . . . . .	215
XXI. PERINO DEL VAGA . . . . .	222
XXII. BACCIO BANDINELLI . . . . .	233
XXIII. RUSTICI . . . . .	248
XXIV. SALVIATI . . . . .	258
XXV. TITIAN . . . . .	269
XXVI. MICHAEL ANGELO . . . . .	278

## INTRODUCTION

The greatest rediscovery of the Renaissance was, undoubtedly, that man is the measure of all things, and the best, no, the only proper, study of man. Portraiture, rarely practiced during the Middle Ages, and biography, virtually dead after Plutarch, became favored pursuits, and it was an artist who was to combine both with distinction.

He was Giorgio Vasari, urbane, versatile, indefatigable, no leading spirit but one who followed the tastes of his patrons—neither an adventurer nor rake like his contemporary, Benvenuto Cellini, but an uxurious little man who, on his many business trips, sent his “cara consorte” passionate poems to tell her how he missed her presence.

No better person could have been found in Cinquecento Italy than this Signor Vasari for preparing what, all chattiness and inaccuracy notwithstanding, is the precursor of all modern biographical dictionaries and “*Who’s Who’s*” in the arts. Even as a boy, he was a model of assiduity: while the others were playing in the sunshine, he would perfect himself in drawing, and he could recite whole books of Virgil’s *Aeneid* from memory. An incredibly rapid worker in everything he undertook, he lacked the real scholar’s patience and thoroughness. But this born courtier knew everybody, and was able to elicit information and editorial help from many learned humanists.

One evening in 1546, quite a few of these men gathered at a supper party in the palace of Cardinal Farnese at Rome, Vasari among them. On this occasion, a noted collector, Bishop Paolo Giovio, outlined in detail his plan for writing a treatise on all distinguished artists. Pressed for an opinion, Vasari approved, “provided that Giovio were assisted by a painter or somebody who could put the facts into their proper order and explain the technicalities to him.”

Thereupon the Cardinal asked Vasari, “Could you not . . . give him a summary and a classified list of all the artists, arranged in order, whereby you would also advance the artists?”

“Most Illustrious Cardinal, though I know that this task is too great for my poor powers, I promise to perform it as well as I am able,” agreed Vasari.

Unlike many amateurs, the Bishop knew his limitations. When some time later, Vasari arrived with a sheaf of material, the collector persuaded the artist to complete the work himself as

he was clearly better equipped for it. Since Vasari was swamped with commissions and could write only in his leisure hours, it is remarkable that the handbook did appear only four years after the supper party. Issued in two volumes, it contained one hundred and thirty-three biographies, and was entitled, *Delle Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori*. Eighteen years later, in 1568, a revised and enlarged three-volume edition was printed. This time, one hundred and sixty-one *Lives* included some contemporaries. The edition was adorned with woodcut portraits and, like the earlier one, it was dedicated to the "most illustrious and most excellent" Cosimo de' Medici, Grand Duke of Florence.

Today, scholars say "Vasari," to avoid the tediously long title of the book, just as they say "Gibbon" in reference to *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Both works have been reissued repeatedly, both in complete and abridged versions, yet nine out of ten readers know nothing about the life of either of these authors, although both of them wrote fascinating autobiographies. Just as Gibbon achieved immortality as an historian, not as a captain of militia or member of parliament, so Vasari is known today through his literary work, not as an artist or architect.

He was born in the walled hill-town of Arezzo, Tuscany, in 1511, the son of a minor painter. As a youth, he had the good fortune to study under Luca Signorelli and Andrea del Sarto. He worked for the most distinguished patrons—popes, cardinals, and of course, the rulers of Florence—and received many commissions. Even his harshest critics do not deny his excellence as an architect: the best known among the buildings he designed is the Palazzo degli Uffizi, originally built for Grand Duke Cosimo to house the government offices and now a famous museum. There is less agreement on his merits as a painter. Nearly a half century ago, his biographer, Robert W. Carden, wrote: "Vasari's paintings are so inferior that it would be a waste of time to emphasize their demerits . . . His literary legacy is of far greater value."

The second sentence is still true, but today we no longer consider the Mannerist style—exemplified by Pontormo, Rosso, and Parmigiano, and subsequently by Bronzino, Salviati and Vasari—a perversion of the art of the high Renaissance. In Vasari's frescoes, crowded with elongated figures whirling through operatic landscapes or architectural settings, one finds the restlessness and violent movement of an age of virtuosi, filled neither with awe for the transcendent, as in the Gothic period, nor with veneration for human dignity and man's self-sufficiency, as in

the earlier Renaissance. Vasari was interested in the broad effect rather than in delicacy or finish. Yet this decorator's intricate, almost feverish, way of painting helped to usher in the style of the Baroque! As a portraitist, he holds a rather high rank, particularly since some excellent portraits, once attributed to Bronzino or Pontormo, are now credited to him.

In any case, Vasari suffered from no "inferiority complex"; he saw himself as a worthy successor to Michelangelo and to Raphael. Although he worshipped his "divinissimo" Michelangelo, as nearly every chapter of the *Lives* attests, he reassured Duke Cosimo, on the very day of his idol's burial, about the future of the arts, promising to look to it personally: "I shall spare no pains to keep these noble arts alive and to advance them by means of my paintings, my writings, and by every other means within my powers."

When he wrote this, in 1564, the first edition of the *Lives* had long been sold out. In the preface to this edition, however, he had been most apologetic about his writing ability: "I neither expect nor delude myself with the hope of making a name for myself as a historian or writer of books . . . . My business in life is to paint, not to write . . . . I have written as a simple painter should write and in my own language."

He did not stray far from the truth when, in the dedication, he emphasized the labor that the work had cost him: "You will realize the diligence with which I have completed the work, robbing myself of my own leisure in order to do [the artists and architects] such honor as lay in my power."

As the years went by, however, he grew prouder and prouder of his work, even though adverse criticisms were not lacking. He was bold enough to write in the new preface: "It is rather a lucky thing for many of these painters that through the beneficence of the Almighty . . . . I have been spared long enough to rewrite nearly the whole of my book . . . ."

He felt entitled to include an autobiographical chapter which culminated in the statement that he had "worked hard . . . for the betterment of these most noble arts."

One may smile at this naive conceit, yet time has somewhat vindicated Vasari. In the last century, writers habitually stressed the most flagrant inaccuracies of his work, thus calling into question its truth as a whole. Today, we are more charitable. We no longer think of Vasari as a myth-maker or mystifier, but keep in mind under what difficulties he compiled his material in an age that was without reference libraries, and in which a trip



even from Florence to Venice demanded a major effort. Considering the disadvantages under which he worked, one is surprised that no more errors crept into his text than have been discovered so far. He made the best use of whatever documents were available, but he had to rely upon the oral tradition that had survived to his time. Credulously, he incorporated into his stories details which appear absurd to us, but were acceptable to a 16th-century man. Actually some of these details, once rejected as "fantastic," seen in the light of recently discovered documents, even appear to be true!

Vasari has been charged with having favored Tuscan artists at the expense of members of the other Italian schools, but what could be more natural? Unconsciously, even today, a French historian of art will stress the importance of the school of Paris, while a German will put his emphasis on Durer, or the *Expressionismus*. In addition, one should remember what Vasari has to say about the greatest of all the Venetian painters: "Titian, having adorned Venice, or rather Italy, and indeed other parts of the world, with the finest pictures, deserves to be loved and studied by artists, and in many things imitated, for he has done works worthy of infinite praise, which will last as long as illustrious men are remembered."

Although living in a period of artistic decline, Vasari stubbornly clung to the Renaissance idea of the steady progress of art, and proudly saw its culmination in his own era. Hence, the divisions of his book into three periods: infancy, youth, and manhood of the arts. Yet Vasari did not permit his admiration of skill and virtuosity to blind him to the great merits of the Primitives. One must remember that, not so long ago, Ducento or Trecento masters, and even Botticelli and his contemporaries, were held in low esteem in order to appreciate the homage paid by Vasari to such pathfinders as Cimabue and Giotto.

Among the masters of his own time, the only great one with whom he was on intimate terms was Michelangelo. It was no small compliment that the unworldly, unsociable master paid the utterly wordly younger man by showing him a paternal affection. Vasari described in a letter his visit to Michelangelo, then in his eighties:

"He did not expect me and showed as much feeling as a father who has recovered a lost son. He threw his arms around my neck and kissed me a thousand times, crying with pleasure."

That Vasari was not unaware of the good fortune that had thrown him into the path of a man like Michelangelo can be

gathered from the end of the chapter on the painter in the *Lives*: "Certainly he was sent into the world to be an example to men of art, that they should learn from his life and from his works; and I, who have to thank God for felicity rare among men of our profession, count among my greatest blessings that I was born in the time when Michelangelo was alive, and was counted worthy to have him for my master, and to be treated by him as a familiar friend, as every one knows."

Yet he did not allow the very great ones, such as Da Vinci and Michelangelo, Raphael and Titian, completely to outshine the lesser stars. His pages include both the jester Buffalmacco (mentioned in the *Decameron*) and the psychotic Bandinelli. The lustiness of Fra Filippo is there, as is the weakness of Andrea del Sarto, and the eccentricity of Piero di Cosimo.

He loved to adorn his tales with memorable little episodes: the young shepherd Giotto's talent accidentally being discovered by Cimabue; Piero di Cosimo living entirely on hard-boiled eggs which, to spare fuel, he cooked when he boiled his varnishes; Paolo Uccello, when urged by his wife to come to bed at last, protesting, "Oh, what a sweet thing this perspective is!"; Filippo Lippi impressing his Moorish captors by his draftsmanship and thereby buying his way back to freedom. There are dozens of more, equally charming.

But he was not only a story-teller; he also had an eye for beauty, whether he described a Madonna in a church at Florence (attributing the picture to Cimabue, though it is probably the work of one of Giotto's followers) or Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* frescoes. Above all, he was bold enough to feel that modern civilization was itself worth writing about—not merely an echo of the glorious past. Hence the first edition began with Cimabue rather than, as was customary, with the ancients, and only for the second edition did he feel compelled to write an introduction that traced the origin of the arts of design from the Chaldeans, via Greece and Rome, to his own era.

Much as we admire his progressive spirit and the catholicity of his taste, what gives the *Lives* their immortality is the quality of great passion that can be felt in every line, the fact that, apart from its value as a source of information, it is, above all, a true work of literature. Perhaps it was a good thing that in Vasari's time there was none of the modern fear of inaccuracy. If this always busy, always impatient, man had been required to spend much time on the verification of facts, he might have told us only one-tenth of what we now have or, more probably,